

Why You Did What You Did by rosekings

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-02-18

Updated: 2018-02-18

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:08:16

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,611

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

*"This is why you did what you did in September, isn't it?" Mike says.
"Because the monster is coming after me this time."*

*El looks at him and his perfect eyes and his adorable freckles and his sweet heart, and the pit of sadness in her stomach only grows bigger.
"Yes."*

Why You Did What You Did

Author's Note:

Written as a prompt fill from a friend on my [Tumblr](#).

"Open it, El! Break it!"

Hopper's voice barely sounds over the buzzing in Eleven's ears. Her powers are rolling through her, rising and falling in sync with her fear. With a clench of her fingers, the massive padlock on the gates to Hawkins National Laboratory snaps in half. Steve and Jonathan drag the gates open, and then Hopper is ushering everyone through and they're all racing down the road to the building that's been closed for almost a year.

El breaks the chains on the lab's doors and they rush inside. After a moment's concentration, she fuses the doors shut behind them. Hopper leads them down a corridor and into a dark room where, finally, they can rest for a minute and catch their breath.

Everything went to hell about an hour ago, though El's body says it was ages. The darkness - the 'Mind Flayer,' Dustin calls it - finally seeped through the gate and into the real world. It'd been growing for weeks, waiting, slowly tearing open the rift, until eventually it pulled through. It and its epic darkness have been chasing them, driving them back to the very place it came from for its revenge on Will and El.

Except, Will and El aren't who it came for this time.

Dustin flips on the lights and gives a short laugh. "Pudding, anyone?" They're in a cafeteria, one very similar to the one that El ate lunch in with her friends just a week ago.

"Can't believe the power still works," Hopper notes, a hand on his (useless) rifle.

"Do the doors lock?" Lucas asks. Hopper checks and shakes his head.

"We'll be fine for a minute."

El glares at the seam where the two doors meet and they melt together, just like she did to the front doors. Despite this new security measure, she doesn't feel much safer, considering their enemy is a swirling black cloud that emits despair and hopelessness wherever it goes. Walls haven't proved to be much protection against it.

"Come on, Max, let's go find pudding," Dustin says, ever the optimist. Him, Lucas, and Max slink off towards the kitchen in the back corner of the wide-open space. All the tables and chairs are gone, having been removed and donated to school use when the lab shut down, so the rest of them spread out to lean against the walls. Steve, Nancy, and Jonathan slump together on the closest bit of floor they can find with their hands interlocked and eyelids already shut from exhaustion. Will sits between Joyce and Hopper and drops his head between his knees. El knows he can feel every move the Mind Flayer is making - she feels it, too.

"El."

El turns to see Mike, gesturing her towards a spot on the floor. She follows him and they collapse against the wall, close enough to the others to feel safe yet far away enough for a bit of privacy.

"Are you okay?" Mike asks quietly. El nods, shoving her sweaty curls away from her face. Her powers are stronger than they were last year and so far she hasn't been physically hurt. She looks at Mike: he's bleeding from a cut on his arm and his jacket is in shreds, but he looks alive, at least.

"You're bleeding," El says, nodding to his arm. He glances at it, shrugging.

"It'll be fine."

They sit in silence, listening to each other's breathing slow down. El can feel the freshly-opened gate several hundred feet below her, tugging at her gut, intensifying the buzzing in her ears and the fear in her mind.

"This is why you did what you did in September, isn't it?" Mike says. "Because the monster is coming after me this time."

El looks at him and his perfect eyes and his adorable freckles and his sweet heart, and the pit of sadness in her stomach only grows bigger. "Yes."

Mike has never been more content. The leaves are falling in a bright spectrum of oranges and yellows, the weather is perfect for biking and playing warriors in the forest, and his friends are always at his side. Sure, El and Will have been acting kind of odd lately, but Mike brushes it off - they're always a little weird. He thinks they might be telepathic or something. Either way, things are finally back to normal.

That particular afternoon after school, El suggests they take the long way back to Hopper's cabin. They've already split from the rest of the party and Mike doesn't have anything else to do except homework, so he agrees. Why pass up a few more minutes of peaceful walking with the telekinetic love of his life?

They turn onto the back road and trek in silence. El stoops as they walk to pick up a handful of crunchy leaves. She clenches them in her fist, uncurling her fingers to let the bits and pieces get swept away in the breeze.

"You're quiet today," Mike notes. "Everything okay?"

El doesn't respond, just brushes off her hands and tucks her thumbs in her backpack straps. She stares ahead at the trail, curls bouncing around her forehead with each step.

"El?"

"I have to tell you something."

Her tone catches him off-guard, like she's about to announce that someone just died. "Yeah?"

"I - I can't do this anymore."

"Do what?"

El stops walking and reaches out, taking Mike's hand. "This."

Mike falters, staring at their fingers as his happy mood stumbles. "Us?"

El nods, dropping her hand. Mike looks at her, confusion crowding his brain. "But - why? What happened? Did I do something wrong?"

She shakes her head. "It isn't your fault."

"Really, El, I'm so sorry if I did or said anything to make you unhappy -"

"No, Mike. I just - I don't..." El trails off, unable to find the right words.

"Don't like me like that?" Mike supplies quietly, the cold tendrils of rejection spreading through his stomach.

"Yes."

Mike swallows, staring at the girl who he's been trying to say 'I love you' to for four months. Apparently he had severely misjudged their relationship. "Okay. That's - okay. Cool. Good. Um -"

"I should go. Hopper might get worried."

"Yeah, of course. Sure. Definitely."

"I'll - I'll see you at school tomorrow." El gives him one last look, and for a split second Mike thinks he sees something there - a lie, a regret, something that suggests El isn't telling the truth. But then it's over and she's gone, sprinting down the road and taking a chunk of Mike's heart with her.

"You knew this would happen," Mike says. El nods, shaking away the memory of turning her back on him. She cried herself to sleep that night. And the next. And the next. She never got over it - she still hasn't. The only thing that could console her was the fact that it was necessary. She was protecting him. The monsters knew that he was important to her, so she thought that if she made him unimportant, they would leave him alone.

She was wrong.

"You should have told me, El," Mike says.

"I was trying to protect you," she answers, wiping her wet cheeks on her shoulders. She didn't even realize she was crying.

"I don't care. I never, *ever* want to be away from you, monster or not."

El reaches over and grabs his hand, breathing out a sigh of relief when he reciprocates. "I want you to be...safe. Happy."

Mike laughs. "I can never be unhappy when I'm with you, El."

El musters up what smile she can, what with her bone-weariness, and Mike slides his free hand behind her neck to bring their foreheads together. She's almost dizzy from the feeling of being so close again after two months of carefully distancing herself from him.

"El..." Mike whispers. El squeezes her eyes shut, blocking out the darkness and the monsters outside.

"Yes?"

Mike's fingers twist in her hair as he summons up the courage to say whatever it is he has to say.

"Mike?"

"I love you, El."

There's a whoosh in El's stomach and she feels like she's floating all of a sudden. She knows the weight of those words after seeing them on TV and in books, and after watching Steve and Nancy and Jonathan exchange them over the past year. She knows that they're special words reserved for special people. People you'd die for. People you'd *live* for. And El knows, with complete certainty, that Mike Wheeler is one of those people.

"I love you too, Mike."

She opens her eyes just in time to see Mike grin. He leans forward and kisses her, and then she's kissing him back, and she's so full of relief and happiness that it almost cancels out the evil swarming around them. Almost.

They pull apart right as the floor beneath them is rocked with a tremor. Hopper jumps up, head swinging back and forth.

"What the hell was that?" Dustin asks, emerging from the kitchen with Max and Lucas right behind him.

"Earthquake?" Jonathan asks. Hopper shakes his head.

"Time to move."

Steve helps Nancy and Jonathan to their feet, and once Will and Joyce get up, they cross the floor and exit out the back doors of the cafeteria.

As they move down through the building, Mike never lets go of El's hand, and El finds extreme comfort in knowing that whatever happens, he loves her. Even if something goes wrong and their plan doesn't work out and someone gets hurt, he loves her and she loves him and that *has* to be enough to get them through the night. It has to be.